

VZCZCXR06062
RR RUEHIK RUEHYG
DE RUEHFR #6943/01 2931651
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 201651Z OCT 06
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2397
INFO RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE
RUEHMRE/AMCONSUL MARSEILLE 1364
RUEHSR/AMCONSUL STRASBOURG 0208

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 006943

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/PPD, EUR/WE, INR

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL KPAO OPRC FR

SUBJECT: MEDIA WRAP-UP: DPRK SANCTIONS, IRAQ AND FRENCH-TURKISH TENSIONS. OCTOBER 20, 2006

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Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) This week's commentary led with items on potential sanctions following North Korea's nuclear test and the difficulty of finding a balance between a firm stance and China's concerns over the "disintegration" of North Korea (DPRK), with a number of media linking the DPRK and Iran. Iraq stayed high on the media agenda following speculation about the Baker Study Group's possible recommendations and commentary on the British stance and a possible new Pentagon doctrine. French editorialists analyzed the growing tension between France and Turkey in the context of a bill aiming to criminalize denial of the 'Armenian genocide' within the framework of complex EU-Turkey negotiations. End Summary.

DPRK SANCTIONS -- IRAN WATCHFUL

¶12. (SBU) Secretary of State Rice's trip to Asia led left-of-center Le Monde to argue in an editorial that "the united front at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) was fragile and that serious snags could be expected between Washington and Beijing" on the DPRK sanctions issue. Right-of-center Le Figaro intoned that "China's reservations would be at the center of the talks with Secretary Rice" and that Beijing "was concerned about the regional consequences of a disintegration of the North Korean regime." Right-of-center Le Figaro also argued that China "was afraid of having to pick up the pieces in the event that the Bush Administration went ahead with its old design of toppling the regime of the third member of the 'axis of evil.'"

¶13. (SBU) Right-of-center Le Figaro noted that "Iran was watching developments with interest" and would take into account the level of "determination adopted in implementing the sanctions." France's call for unity from the international community "when it is facing other proliferation crises" led right-of-center Le Figaro to agree that "making a connection between the two current nuclear crises was inevitable" and "forced the EU to adopt a tougher stance towards Iran, while remaining cautious."

BAKER IRAQ STUDY GROUP ELICITS CONJECTURE

¶14. (SBU) Right-of-center Le Figaro reported that, far from past

plans to bring home the GIs, "the numbers of soldiers on the ground had increased to 141,000, with great pressure to maintain troops in Iraq for a long period." Philippe Gelie in right-of-center Le Figaro cited escalating casualties to speculate on the "Pentagon's last touches to a new doctrine" without developing his subject. Right-of-center Le Journal du Dimanche claimed that "Washington was considering a 'coup' in Iraq to put an end to the quagmire." Popular right-of-center France Soir quoted UK General Richard Dannat and Le Journal du Dimanche as it editorialized about "pulling out" or reverting to "a coup."

¶15. (SBU) Left-of-center Le Monde suggested that Washington's "Iraq strategy" would be a factor in the November elections and picked up the L.A. Times' report that Baker was suggesting two options, "Baghdad's stabilization with help from Syria and Iran or a gradual pullout from Iraq to bases situated outside Iraq." Left-wing Liberation argued in a harsh editorial that "Iraq was a millstone around the Republicans' necks" and that President Bush was no longer credible, claiming, "The time for lofty speeches about democracy is over." The editorial alleged that Washington was uneasy about the Iraqi government's lack of progress, concluding, "Baker will have to offer a way out that preserves America's honor and guarantees Iraq's survival: in short, mission impossible."

TURKEY REACTS TO FRENCH 'ARMENIAN GENOCIDE' BILL

¶16. (SBU) Commentators argued that "since Chirac recently linked Turkey's EU membership to the 'Armenian genocide'" a "slow deterioration" in Franco-Turkish relations was taking place, peaking with the Socialist-led bill criminalizing revisionism of the 'genocide.' Despite Chirac's call to Turkish PM Erdogan, and PM Villepin's opposition to the bill, "because it is not a good idea to legislate about matters of history or remembrance," right-of-center Le Figaro concluded that "France's prestige in Turkey was tarnished." One commentator in left-of-center Le Monde criticized the Socialists for "playing up to France's Armenian constituency and

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more broadly to all those in France who oppose Turkey's EU membership." Right-of-center Le Figaro emphasized that "what Turkey is calling 'Chirac's criteria' for EU membership did not fit with the Copenhagen criteria," leading France's EU allies to "distance themselves from a stance which did not reflect Europe's position," as noted by the Finnish EU-President. Reports of media-fueled anti-French feelings in Turkey and demands for "retaliatory trade sanctions" led left-wing Liberation to comment that "Turkey can boycott, but with moderation," a position shared by most commentators who argued that "Ankara cannot afford to push French companies out of Turkey."

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